

## Owners fear losing horse farm as EPA delays asbestos cleanup

By DORY DEVLIN

The owners of the Meyersville Horse Farm say the federal Environmental Protection Agency's handling of an asbestos cleanup on their White Bridge Road property could cost them their business.

After the EPA came into the Passaic Township community of Meyersville in late August and closed Dave and Joyce Major's riding ring, originally a National Gypsum landfill, agency officials promised a new ring would be created elsewhere on the property following soil tests.

Because the soil tests showed traces of asbestos on other parts of the horse farm, however, the agency has reneged on its original offer, the Majors said.

"They want zero tolerance, and that's just not feasible," said Dave Major.

"Basically, what they are doing is in a round about way is pulling us out of business," added his wife.

Richard Cahill, an EPA spokesman, said the agency cannot approve another ring because no measure of acceptable levels of asbestos in soil has been set. An EPA task force in Washington is working on just that, but has not agreed on a limit, Cahill said.

"We are very sympathetic to them," Cahill said referring to the Majors. "We're trying to expedite this by staying on top of the people in headquarters" who will establish the safety levels.

Joyce Major, however, said that explanation is hard to swallow.

"How can they close us down in the first place if they never established acceptable levels?" she asked. The agency's acceptable asbestos levels for inside workers are higher than the tests revealed exist in the soil outside the ring, she added.

The Majors, who have lived on the property 20 years are critical of the EPA because the agency expedited the soil tests, performed a month ago, so a new ring could be constructed, but then backed away once the sampling was completed.

Based on the EPA's original plans, the Majors told their 20 boarders a new ring would be open by Thanksgiving. Now, with no idea when or if a new ring will be established, they fear they will lose credibility with their customers, all of whom have stayed put so far.

"They are destroying us," Dave Major said. The couple has received only two letters from the agency — the Aug. 26 notification that asbestos was found on the property and the Oct. 26 letter saying another riding area would be constructed.

The ring itself is covered with a white geotextile tarpaulin anchored with hundreds of sandbags. Signs reading "Danger, Asbestos Area" hang on the fence blocking off the area.

Underneath lie the remains of a landfill created by National Gypsum, which produced cement asbestos siding and roofing sheets on a nearby Millington site from 1951 to 1973. That site is now on the federal superfund list targeted for hazardous waste cleanup. When airborne, asbestos is hazardous.

The EPA also has taken steps at another Meyersville property on New Vernon Road to mitigate the presence of asbestos. A barn with asbestos shingles has been removed and the driveway was covered with asphalt, Cahill said. Additionally, the house, garage and an apartment on the property, also home to a tree service business, were cleaned with a special vacuum, he said.



Photo by George Baumann

A warning sign is posted along the riding ring area of the Meyersville Horse Farm. The site, off White Bridge Road, formerly was a gypsum company landfill.

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